



LOW HANGING FRUIT

It's Greek to Me

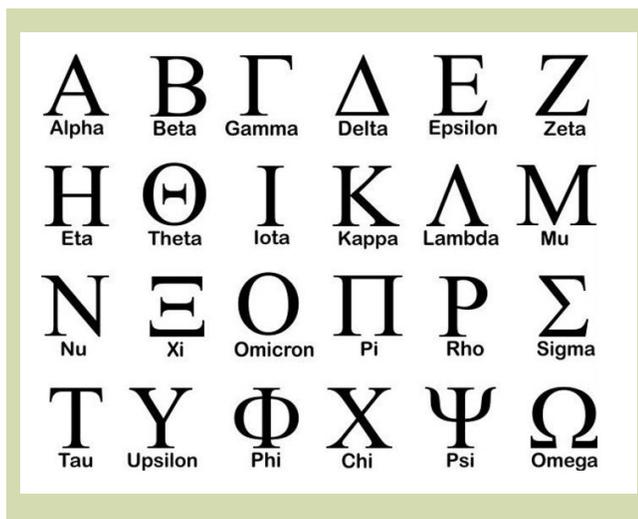
By Jeannie Standal

Whether in Greece or not, the Greek alphabet is everywhere. From virus variants to Atlantic storms to math and science to company names, non-Greek languages use the Greek alphabet everyday. Why?

The evolution, influence, and migration of languages is complicated, to say the least, but there are a couple of simpler reasons that Greek has such a presence in English. First, foundations of modern mathematics came from ancient Greece. Mathematicians have been using Greek letters to represent constants and variables for millennia, and still use them today in STEM disciplines. Remember the Pythagorean Theorem? That geometry gem, along with the idea of deductive mathematical reasoning, was developed by a Greek brotherhood founded by (you guessed it!) Pythagoras. Some Greek letters used in STEM have become more generalized, too, like the use of Delta (Δ) as the symbol for change in anything, not just value.

American sororities and fraternities began as academic clubs, like debate clubs, and adopted Greek names to sound more serious and differentiate themselves from the hard-partying "academic" clubs that used Latin names. The first of these founded at William & Mary in 1776, Phi Beta Kappa ($\Phi\beta\kappa$), is now the oldest and most prestigious honor society in the United States. Social clubs adopted the Greek idea and became the university Greek system we know today.

Greek is an ancient language, but it is still the common language used in Greece and is written with this 24 letter alphabet.



Ask your students to take a look around their worlds and notice where they see the Greek alphabet. Perhaps even in their classroom!

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



"Greek language" entry in World Book Student

Part of lili.org's suite of online encyclopedias, World Book Student is directed toward middle grade students. Its "Greek language" entry contains a chart of the Greek alphabet (and corresponding English sounds), a map of ancient Greece, an overview of the development of ancient Greek and later developments, and a Related Information tab at the top of the page with additional articles of interest. This entry also offers World Book's standard (and very helpful!) features, including citation help in a variety of formats (at the bottom of the page) and the ability to have the content read aloud at a slower or faster pace in a variety of English-language accents. To access, visit World Book Student via the link below, type "Greek language" in the search bar, and select the top result (which should be "Greek language").

<https://lili.org/dbs/world-book-student/>

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



21 English Words That are Actually Greek (and the Stories Behind Them)

Did you know you already kind of speak Greek? [Check out this list](#) of English words derived from Greek and learn some history, mythology, and etymology in the process! I, for one, was delighted to learn that "panic" is derived from the ancient Greek goat-god Pan! This could serve as fodder for a rousing classroom discussion about the continuing evolution of language, and a jumping off point for modern-day examples (i.e., Google, selfie, ghost).

DIGITAL TOOLS



Pronunciator

You know the expression, "It's all Greek to me"? You could say that, and make it mean, "I know what I'm talking about!" by spending some time with Pronunciator's Greek module. And that's just one of 164 languages you can learn (including American Sign Language)! Find it—and other great educational databases—here:

<https://lili.org/dbs/pronunciator/>.



